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ABSTRACT

The Independent Study course at Waubonsee Community College is offered for two semester hours of credit, accumulative to a maximum of four semester hours. Students not completing their independent study project in one semester may receive an extension for an additional semester. Analysis of the records of 91 Independent Study enrollees in the fall, spring, interim, and summer semester of the 1974-75 school year indicated that 54% had completed the course (48% in one semester), 40% continued their project into the fall, 1975 semester, and 7% withdrew. The students represented 13 curricular areas of the college and their study topics reflected this wide variation; 19% were psychology majors, 14% were pre-education majors, 16% were undecided, and the remainder were equally distributed among other transfer program areas. Continuation of the Independent Study course is recommended, but some constraints on completion time should be implemented, while the maximum allowable amount of credit should be increased. Extension of the course to include vocational students should be considered. (BB)

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# A Report on the

# Independent Study Program

## Waubonsee Community College

## Sugar Grove, Illinois

Submitted by:

Gary W. Frazer
December, 1975

JC 760 560

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## Introduction

For the past two years, Waubonsee Community College has been offering students a chance to study specific subjects in depth without the constraints of regularly scheduled classroom meetings or formally scheduled courses. This Independent Study course is offered for two semester hours of credit per course, accumulative to a maximum of four semester hours. The student is required to spend a minimum of six hours per week on the project. If the student does not complete the study in one semester, he is allowed to carry over his course work one more semester. If he does not complete the study after the extension period, he will be dropped or given a grade of "F".

The study which the student undertakes should reflect a reasonable and moderate extension of courses already approved for college-parallel programs. However, Independent Study 201 is not to be taken in lieu of a regularly scheduled academic course.

A student interested in initiating an Independent Study contract must have sophomore standing or the permission of the Assistant Dean. After contacting an instructor with his request, the student then contacts the division chairperson and the Assistant Dean of the Transfer Programs for approval.

The faculty member with whom the student works has the privilege of accepting, modifying, rejecting, or postponing the Independent Study request.

Completion of the Independent Study course must show tangible evidence of the student's academic work. It can be in the form of a final exam, term paper, model, slide presentation, or any other project which demonstrates that legitimate investigation has taken place. For example, two biology students were interested in studying the development of American prairie grass. Since this interest coincided with the local bicentennial commission's desire to return the campus to its natural state, the students were given permission to reconstruct a prairie on the campus grounds. Special grass seeds were purchased and the students turned a barren plot into a prairie. The students cared for and

studied the seeds during their growth. The result of this planting will help other biology, zoology students in the future study of animal habitats in this type of environment.

## The Problem

### Statement of the Problem

The purposes of this study were: (1) to identify how many students have been enrolled in Independent Study 201 from its beginning to the present time; (2) to identify the various curricular divisions which students are enrolled in; (3) to determine how many students have completed the course and how many have not; and (4) to determine the length of time needed to complete the course by the students.

### Importance of the Study

With the change in the American lifestyle and the "knowledge explosion," alternative methods of learning should be developed to meet the needs of individuals. Research has shown that students who are allowed to progress at their own rate of speed and under less stressful situations (i.e., traditional classrooms and pre-arranged time schedules) understand and retain more of the specified learning objectives. It is the responsibility of higher education to provide alternative modes of instruction in order to meet students' needs.

Presently, the community college is a leader in providing a comprehensive educational program to meet the needs of students beyond the high school. Although the community colleges characteristically offer more versatile programs than four-year institutions, movement has been slow in the development of programs which provide the flexibility of independent study. This type of flexibility allows the student self-directed learning with little concern given to time constraints as long as the intended outcomes are met.

Little research exists on those programs which have been established in community colleges designed to meet the flexibility of independent study programs.

If the community college is indeed unique in its claim to offer a comprehensive education to all students beyond high school, then it must be an innovative leader in developing and evaluating programs which will meet all aspects of student learning.

## Review of the Literature

Few articles have been written on the independent study approach to learning in the community college. However, the articles which are available have given direction to this report.

A study by Henry Lemstrom was designed to determine the extent and nature of independent study programs on the two-year college campuses across the western half of the nation. The study further sought to determine whether differences existed in the use of independent study in colleges as regards variance in enrollment, geographical location, type of control, part-time/full-time faculty ratio, and age of the institutions.

This study was conducted by use of a questionnaire survey followed by visitations to certain colleges. The sample, drawn from two-year colleges located in western continental United States, included 253 institutions from 25 states. There were 202 usable returns accounting for 79.8% of the sample. The study revealed that public, comprehensive, and relatively large colleges located in independent districts were more apt to have instituted independent study programs. Fewer programs were found in smaller private or public colleges in unified districts, branches or state community colleges located in south central United States. Where there were independent study programs, they tended to be library oriented, requiring minimum entry regulations, permitting liberal allowance of credits toward graduation, and generating relatively few problems. The study indicated that the majority of colleges included in the survey had independent

study programs. Many institutions where independent study programs did not exist were planning such programs. In spite of the wide usage, relatively few students and faculty were actually involved. Independent study appeared to be valuable as an alternative instructional method for special purposes or situations.[1]

The need for more personalized instruction has become apparent in all of education. Community colleges have taken the leadership in providing this approach in higher education. One such leader has been Oakton Community College in Michigan. An article by Mary Mittler of Oakton Community College discusses the need at the community college level for the development of new styles of modes of education that are consistent with the uniqueness of the individual student and will help him realize his human potential. Such styles or modes are based upon an educational theory called confluent education.

The semester for self-directed study is a mode of education that allows for a learning environment that meets the cognitive as well as affective need of students who will not or cannot cope with the more traditional modes of learning. The semester for self-directed study was developed, proposed, and instituted at Oakton Community College during the 1971-72 academic year. Mittler outlines the proposal upon which this program was based including the methodology, faculty recruitment and selection, curriculum--prerequisites and transferability, role of the student development personnel, organization and management, field study, facilities, and accountability and collection and treatment of data. The program has been so successful that plans have been made to expand it.[2]

A similar approach to personalized learning exists in the program currently operating at North Country Community College at Sarnac Lake, New York. This innovative program of self-directed learning offers individualized instruction that allows the students to choose their own topics and methods of learning. Although less sophisticated than Oakton's approach, a study of the program at North Country was more helpful in this report due to its parallel structure of the Independent Study Program at Waubonsee.

This program allows a maximum of 15 semester credits to be earned in individual studies and applied toward a degree or certificate. An interested student applies to his/her faculty advisor for permission to explore an interest. A committee is then formed and composed of two individuals of the student's choice, a representative from the academic dean's office, one from student services, two faculty members representative of the relevant area of interest, the student himself, and a consultant representing a student-selected organization or institution. The job of the committee is to formulate the program of individual studies which is tailored to the specific needs and interests of the student.

Examples of projects or experiences used for the study might be: community or institutional service, independent study, research or an industrial or commercial experience. Evaluation of the program is done by the committee and is based upon predetermined objectives. The amount of credit is awarded by the committee at the time of completion of the project. There was no report given as to the success or failure of the program.[3]

A research project was conducted by Michael Murdock at Prince George's Community College in Largo, Maryland to determine which mode of learning was preferable - independent study or lecture-discussion. This study was conducted to extend the present state of research involving independent study as a teaching and learning methodology in the two-year community college. A stratified random sample of 241 subjects was organized into six day and two night sessions of freshman English at Prince George's Community College. Four instructors were randomly assigned one independent study section and one lecture-discussion section each. Pre-tests were administered, treatments were applied and checked, and post-tests were then administered. Major instruments used in the study were the Otis Self-Administering Tests of Mental Ability, the Sequential Tests of Educational Progress-Writing (STEP), essay tests, and a student satisfaction questionnaire designed by the investigator. A reliability coefficient for the raters who graded the post-test essays was .84, while that of the questionnaire was .87. Results

showed that students in the investigation were able to meet the freshman English objectives equally well and with equal satisfaction through both independent study and lecture-discussion.[4]

Libraries, in an effort to expand their services, have begun investigation into the area of curriculum development. Sullins College expanded the library's facility as "a primary source of creativity and intellectual independence."

The independent study program at Sullins College is much more structured than any of those previously described.

Special seminars and independent research projects may involve a single discipline or be interdisciplinary. Topics may be originated by either faculty or students and will include a wide range of projects.

Credit offerings may include courses desirable for a particular curriculum but not offered in the fall or spring terms. Repeat courses in freshman English, humanities, and American institutions may be offered for those who fail the first term. Opportunities to remove high school entrance deficiencies may be available.

Work-study projects, designed to give the students an experiential approach to learning, may include projects on and off campus. Field placement with social service institutions; vocational placement in relation to career choice; trips to major cultural centers for art, dance, drama, and music students; and foreign study in languages constitute some of the opportunities in this area.

A student may not register for more than one project and each student must enroll in two interim terms to be eligible for graduation. Successful completion of two interim terms is required for an associate degree. The independent study projects will be graded on a "pass-fail" basis and will not carry academic credit. A student who successfully completes one interim project and meets the remaining requirements for the general diploma will be eligible for that form of graduation.

If a student chooses to take a credit course, repeats a course failed during the interim term, or fails to satisfactorily meet the standards of the interim

term project, he/she may complete a project during the summer if approved by the committee in charge of independent study.[5]

There is a great variety of approaches to independent study. The implications of the literature are that there is no significant difference between the traditional approach and the independent study approach. However, there is greater flexibility in the opportunities to learn for students in the independent study programs.

## Methodology of the Study

Data was collected about each student enrolled in Independent Study 201 from the Office of the Registrar. Their enrollments spanned the Fall of 1974, Spring, Interim, and Summer semesters of 1975.

The data was analyzed according to: (1) total number of students enrolled in Independent Study 201; (2) students not finishing the course; (3) students who did finish the course; (4) length of time needed to complete the course; and (5) areas of academic major.

In addition to the formal data collected, informal comments were solicited from a few of those students enrolled in Independent Study 201 in the past. (See Appendix A and Appendix B.)

## Limitations of the Study

The scope of this study is narrow and deals only with one complete year's operation of the independent study program. Therefore, it is difficult to generalize about the future success or failure of this type of program.

The fact that this study uses no survey tool restricts the number of conclusions that can be reached. Although few participants were sought to give input regarding their attitudes about this approach, the information given by them is of considerable value in actually planning the direction of this program.

## Analysis of the Data

From the statistics gathered, it is apparent that a majority of those students who enroll for Independent Study 201 finish the course. Fifty-four percent of those enrolled since the Fall of 1974 have completed the course. Only seven percent have withdrawn from the course.

Forty percent of those enrolled over the past three semesters have continued their projects to the present semester. With a total of ninety-one students registered for Independent Study 201, forty percent represents a large student population not yet completing the course.

Of those students completing their projects, forty-eight percent finished Independent Study 201 in one semester. It seems evident that the majority of those students who enroll are conscientious about their involvement in this program.

Six percent of the student population took two or more semesters to finish the course. Since these students did finish the course, such a small percentage would indicate that the students were either involved in a lengthy project or had other personal reasons for needing more time to complete their projects. This is one of the advantages of this type of system.

The projects completed represent a variety of curricular areas. These areas are:

| | |
|---|---|
| Psychology | Choral Music |
| Early Childhood | Business |
| Biology | Journalism |
| Painting | Nutrition |
| Social Science | Physics |
| Speech | Band Music |
| English | |

These areas represent well over half of the baccalaureate programs offered at Waubonsee. Therefore, opportunities are being equally afforded to students for individual inquiry in all curricular areas.

The topics chosen for each project by the students are as varying in areas of interest as are the curricular areas enrolled in. Several of the topics chosen are as follows:

Study of British School System

Early Childhood Education

Cavern Development and Associated Karst Land Forms of Central United States

Multi-Media Drawing

The Study of Social Services in the Aurora Area

National Health Plan of Great Britain

Study in London--Theatre

Comparison of English and American Entertainment

Poetry's Structure and Content

Psychological Aspects of Music Therapy

Chemistry Oriented Computer Programs

Radio Broadcasting

Postwar Recession (Emphasis 1974-75)

Television Newscasts for the Deaf

Recreation Program for the Handicapped

Fundamentals of Nutrition and Food Practices

The Effect of Alcohol on the Performance of Motor and Discrimination Tasks

Research in the Kodaly Method of Music for Young Children

Art for Young Children

Technical Journalism

Listening to Sustained Discourse

Proctor for Introductory Psychology 100

Although these represent but a few of those projects undertaken, they are representative of the sophistication of inquiry being studied by the students enrolled in Independent Study 201.

The areas of major study of each student also reflect the versatility of those enrolled in this program. From the major areas listed, the largest majority of students, nineteen percent, are enrolled in the area of psychology. Sixteen percent are undecided in their major. The next largest group of majors is in pre-education--fourteen percent. The remainder of major areas are distributed equally amongst the students.

It can be noted that two percent of the students are enrolled in majors not offered at Waubonsee. These students are reverse-transfers who returned to Waubonsee in order to fulfill general education requirements.

The number of students and their appropriate area of major can be listed as follows:

| Number of Students | Major | Number of Students | Major |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Pre-Engineering | 1 | Physical Education |
| 9 | Accounting-Business | 1 | Industrial Arts |
| 7 | Biology | 4 | Art |
| 3 | English | 1 | Music |
| 13 | Pre-Education | 2 | Business Administration |
| 15 | Undecided | 1 | Law Enforcement |
| 1 | History | 1 | Mathematics |
| 17 | Psychology | 3 | Intellectual and Cultural Studies |
| 4 | Nursing | 1 | Early Childhood |
| 2 | Social Science | 2 | Not Offered |
| 7 | Liberal Arts | 1 | Physics |
| 1 | Secretarial Science | 1 | Speech |

## Recommendations

The following is a list of recommendations for Waubonsee Community College resulting from this survey:

(1) The findings of this investigation indicate that the independent study approach should continue to be offered as an alternative system for learning.

(2) Although flexibility is important in this program, students need to have time constraints given. Forty-percent continuation of study past one semester is too high of a figure. Students, in cooperation with the supervising faculty member, should agree upon the amount of time needed to complete the project. Continuation of a project beyond the specified time should be granted only under special circumstances and only by the Assistant Dean of Transfer Programs.

(3) Consideration should be given to offering independent study credit to vocational programs. This recommendation is based upon the fact that several students from the vocational area have enrolled for independent study credit in the past. Although these students are enrolled in areas that offer associate degrees in college-parallel programs as well as certificates, several of the students enrolled in non-college-parallel programs may benefit equally from this program.

(4) Review of the literature concerned with independent study programs around the nation indicates that many of the other programs offer more credit than Waubonsee. Many of them offer a maximum of fifteen hours in their programs. The sophistication of the projects undertaken thus far indicates that a great deal of time is being invested in them. Variable credit to a maximum of three semester hours should be offered for each independent study project. The determination for credit should be agreed upon by the student, supervising instructor(s), and the Assistant Dean of Transfer Programs. A maximum of six hours should be allowable in any one curricular area. A maximum of twelve semester hours should be allowable under Independent Study 201. All of these credits should be transferable.

(5) A more accurate record-keeping system should be developed for following the progress of each student. Too many students are lost in the paperwork with the present system.

## Questionnaire for Independent Study 201

1. What are the strengths of the program?

2. What are the weaknesses of the program?

3. Was this course a valuable experience? Why or why not?

4. What would you like to see done differently in this program?

5. Do you feel as if this course should continue to be offered? Why or why not?

Responses Received from the

Questionnaire for Independent Study 201

1. What are the strengths of the program?

   a. Opportunity for individual study and discovery in particular area of interest -- freedom to study and pursue the course stressing the aspects most important to the individual.

   b. Offers students a chance to work on a certain project on their own, without, a large classroom environment. Great for students who would like to spend a little time working on a desired subject in the summer or anytime.

   c. It gives the students an opportunity to study an area of their own choice and to do so at their own rate. There is no set time schedule, (thus it is easily worked around other responsibilities.)

   d. You are allowed to learn using your own style.

   e. It gave me more of an understanding of the material and also I believe I retained more!

   f. The flexibility of study hours.

   g. I think it's great for someone who can work at a faster pace and get it done.

2. What are the weaknesses of the program?

   a. If the student trying to complete an I.S. project is in any way lacking in self-discipline as far as study is concerned, they are bound to run into trouble.

   b. It's very easy to get behind and then drop.

   c. Courses by independent study are convenient, yes, but the teacher is much more understandable.

   d. Possibly for some people this type of program is advantageous, but it wasn't for me.

   e. None, as far as I can tell.

   f. This course is great for people who work and have to juggle hours. I would have preferred to take it in a structured class where there is give and take in discussion and where you can get an immediate answer to a question. I felt some frustration with my achievement in this course even though I received a B.

g. I like a "real-live" instructor better because of an opportunity for feedback and questions.

3. Was this course a valuable experience? Why or why not?

a. It was THE most valuable experience I've had in my career of combining Early Childhood Ed. with my present work as Teacher's Aide at Keeler School for mentally retarded children. The purposes and expectations of the Independent Study were more than fulfilled for me. Through an expenditure of a tremendous amount of time-energy-study-travel I gathered valuable resource material (tangible and intangible) -- Saw first-hand what the English school system is doing for their mentally and physically handicapped child -- saw their use of and stress of the importance of music and art in the schools..in every phase of the student's life.

Because of this Independent Study and my discovery of Music Therapy - particularly in the Goldie Leigh Hospital for Children in London - I am focusing my efforts into this area. Because of the Study I was able to aid in expanding our music department this summer when I returned to my job at Keeler.

In answering this question I am referring back to the report I wrote of my time spent with - and observing Miss Sybil Beresford-Pierse, Head of the Music Therapy Dept.

"..it is difficult to re-play - recapture - the excitement of that morning in these words...but a whole field has been opened up to me that I did not realize was there...It has shown me steps to take - and aids for me in my work in music at Elizabeth Keeler school. Goals to work towards which I had not thought of before...the possibilities - the potentials - the hope that music can bring - will bring to our children at Elizabeth Keeler."

One of the first steps was enrolling in Piano I at Waubonsee - and though I'm in the very elementary stages already I have used the piano with happy results in my work at Keeler.

b. Yes. It was helpful in gaining valuable experience in Radio announcing and programming for myself.

c. Yes, definitely. It gives you a chance to find your own capabilities in self-discipline and to achieve knowledge that perhaps there would not be enough interest in or an instructor available.

d. Yes. I learned alot about teaching I never realized.

e. Yes. I got to meet the instructor personally and make new friends. It helped me express my understanding of the material while helping other kids get through the course.

f. I failed to receive notification of the independent study guidelines, a disadvantage. Moreover, I could not find the instructor when I needed her.

g. The only thing I really missed in the course was interaction with other people. I liked being able to work at my own speed. However, I never

met with the instructor. I never knew how I was doing on the project.

4. What would you like to see done differently in this program?

   a. Nothing.

   b. I have no suggestions.

   c. Work more with instructor.

   d. So many times I wished for someone to discuss with. I found it hard to define some of the terms used in my reading. I will continue taking courses under a professor, even though I got a great deal of understanding from this course.

   e. They should have a question and answer period.

   f. I would have liked to have known what the instructor thought of the project.

5. Do you feel as if this course should continue to be offered? Why or why not?

   a. Definitely - Question #1 answer applies to this.

   b. Yes. I think it is valuable for those students who want to try it.

   c. Yes. I feel that my independent study in London was well worth the trouble and others should not be denied the right to attempt the same kind of thing.

   d. Yes - excellent for creativity which is something that should always be encouraged.

   e. The course would be better in the normal term. Six weeks doesn't allow enough time to pursue subjects in depth. In retrospect, I consider the program one of my more valuable experiences.

   f. I enjoyed it very much. I like being able to study whenever I choose. I felt a pressure to meet the deadlines which made me work harder. If I had my choice, I would take the majority of my classes by independent study.

   g. Yes, because it allows students to study subjects not taught in any of the classes.

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